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ABSTRACT

To improve secondary school organization, operation, and outcomes, a research report presents major results from 13 studies of leadership, decision-making, and change conducted by Project on the Administration and Organization for Instruction staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in cooperation with over 100 schools. National and statewide professional eduational associations, institutions, and agencies nominated innovative and effective schools for the studies. Five studies focused on hypothesis testing of a priori theory utilizing rationalistic, quantitative approaches; eight studies utilized naturalistic, qualitative techniques, including interviews, observations, and record analysis by multiple researchers. All data were gathered on site. Results show that principals, the key educational leaders within schools, achieve positive outcomes by balancing structural/facilitative and supportive/participative behavior. Analysis shows that the content of the issue to be decided determines who is involved and to what extent, before, during, and after a decision is made. Seven change phases reveal the interaction of leadership, decision-making, and change: germination, initiation, evaluation, implementation, routinization, refinement, and renewal. Although oversimplified, these phases describe the interrelationships of leaders and staff in implementing planned educational change for school effectiveness. (PB)

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LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE*

James M. Lipham

Which leadership and decision-making behaviors are essential for implementing effective educational change? Although leadership, decision making, and change typically have been studied separately in educational administration, analysis of the interactions between and among these domains may shed some light on how the effectiveness of the school can be enhanced.

Here, results are reported from 13 recent studies of leadership, decision making, and change in American secondary schools. The studies were conducted by the staff of the Project on the Administration and Organization for Instruction in the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in cooperation with over one-hundred selected secondary schools. It is hoped that the findings of these studies will be useful to researchers in educational administration and to practicing school principals in their continuing efforts to refine, renew, and improve secondary schooling.

At the outset, several distinguishing features of the research reports should be enumerated. First, the schools sampled were more unique than typical; they were selected utilizing the reputational approach. Secondary schools viewed as being innovative and effective were nominated by personnel in national and statewide professional associations, colleges and universities, state departments of education, and other educational agencies.[1] Because of the programmatic research plan, some of the schools were examined over several years, permitting longitudinal analysis of the educational change process.

Second, both rationalistic and naturalistic research paradigms were used. Five of the studies focused on hypothesis testing of a priori theory utilizing a rationalistic, quantitative approach. The eight other studies utilized naturalistic, qualitative techniques, including interviews, observations, and record analysis by multiple researchers. Regardless of whether rationalistic or naturalistic research approaches were used, however, data for all of the studies were gathered on site.

In the sections that follow, the major research results are first presented regarding leadership and decision making. Then, some interactions among leadership, decision making, and change are considered so that the organization, operation, and outcomes of secondary schools may be improved.

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Educational Leadership

Strong leadership is essential for educational change and improvement.[2] Who provides such leadership to the local school? Which leadership styles and behaviors are essential? How do leadership styles relate to positive outcomes? How are positional and emergent leadership related? Answers to these and other questions were sought in several of the studies.

The principal is the key educational leader within the local school.[3, 4] Thus, the principal must be authentic,[5] committed,[6] knowledgeable,[7] and skilled in political, organizational, and interpersonal processes.[8] In implementing an educational improvement, effective principals are careful to elicit the support of the superintendent of schools and other central office personnel who not only facilitate the implementation of an innovation but also serve as buffers and mediators between the local school and the larger community.[9]

Teachers, students, parents, and others expect the principal, as the head of the school, to assume a strong leadership role. The principal sets the mission, direction, and tone for the total school.[10] If the principal is confident about the school's mission and represents it with integrity, then the staff will be willing to consider and adopt that mission more readily. The principal is the focal person who must represent the institution and must have the political adroitness and interpersonal skills to garner faculty support behind a united philosophy of education and plan of action. The success or failure of a principal to institute new or altered curricular directions, to institute organizational components allowing for shared decision making, or to motivate staff toward more responsible and responsive teaching depends on the political and interpersonal skills of the principal.[11] The principal must be skilled in sensing the need for change, convincing others that education can be improved, building coalitions, and inspiring commitment from staff members to fulfill the school's expanded mission.[12]

Regarding leadership styles, a balance between structural and facilitative leadership behavior, on the one hand, and supportive and participative behavior, on the other, is significantly and positively related to the outcome of staff job satisfaction.[13] Although teachers in innovative schools perceive their principals to be highest in supportive behavior, they rank them lowest in facilitative behavior, yet work facilitation has the highest relationship to staff job satisfaction.[14] Perhaps through the years supportive, considerate leadership has been overemphasized. Hence, principals should become more actively engaged in assisting each staff member to do his or her job.

The persistent use of a single leadership style renders the principal less effective. Even so, it is more typical than it is unusual for a leader to possess particular leadership strengths, hence a balanced leadership team, wherein, say, the principal is strong on structure and an assistant principal is strong on consideration, greatly enhances the effective and efficient operation of the school.[15] Therefore, effective team management capitalizes on the compatibility of the leadership capabilities of the members of the school's administrative team.

In addition to capitalizing on compatibility in positional, designated leadership, effective schools foster emergent, transitional leadership—particularly on the part of departmental chairpersons and teachers. In schools wherein emergent, not positional, leadership is fostered, considerable latitude exists for the open expression of ideas, alternatives, and suggestions for action among staff. Such expression usually results in ascribing leadership to the individual who suggests an idea with the responsibility for following through with "getting the job done."[16] Through time, these specialized leadership abilities become recognized, expected, reinforced, and rewarded. Moreover, positional and emergent leadership interact dynamically within the school. Whereas teachers and others typically expect the principal to exercise structural and instrumental, as well as participative, leadership, they generally expect departmental chairpersons to provide supportive and participative, rather than authoritative leadership.[17] Undoubtedly, this is due to the collegial nature of the chairperson's role. Thus, differential latitude exists for the exercise of specific styles of leadership—depending on one's formal position within the school organization.

A balance of structural, facilitative, supportive, and participative leadership behaviors in a school is essential for effective educational decision making.

Educational Decision Making

The complex phenomenon of decision making in schools can be analyzed according to three basic questions: *What* educational decisions are made?; *Who* is involved in making them?; and *How* are they made?[18] What the content of a decision deals with can be classified according to districtwide (institutional), schoolwide (managerial), or classroom (technical) level decisions. Decisional issues can further be viewed as mandatory, permissive, or prohibited.

Regarding decision content, teachers generally feel quite deprived from making managerial decisions. All administrators should, therefore, take special care to include teachers in the following managerial decisions in which they feel particularly deprived: determining the administrative and organizational structure of the school, determining procedures to be used for teacher evaluation, selecting departmental chairpersons or team leaders, evaluating subject departments or teams, hiring new faculty members, setting and revising school goals, and establishing schoolwide policies.[19, 20]

Consideration of decision content in terms of mandatory, permissive, or prohibited issues can also be helpful in improving the school's program.[21] Mandatory issues include those that call for widespread staff participation in decision making, such as determining objectives, establishing policies, and evaluating instruction; permissive issues are those that may or may not call for staff participation, such as the selection of equipment, textbooks, and teaching materials; and prohibited issues include those that do not call for widespread staff participation, such as the assignment of staff or the evaluation of individual teachers. Thus, in seeking a balance between authoritative and participative decision making, the principal should specify at the outset whether or not the content of an issue is mandatory, permissive, or prohibited. It is particularly disheartening to the staff to spend considerable time and effort working on an issue, only to find subsequently that the decision already has been made—"I'm sorry, but we can't do that."

Regarding who should be involved in decision making, the appropriate participation of individuals and groups in making decisions is essential for educational improvement.[22] A high level of staff participation in the decision-making process is characteristic of schools implementing innovative instructional programs, is perceived by staff to be much higher than in typical schools, is a significant factor in the successful implementation of change, and contributes highly to staff satisfaction.[23, 24] The decision-making structures highly satisfying to staff are those that facilitate an exchange of information and opinions within and among departments, accelerate decision making at the teaching-advising level, and afford ready access to administrators. A key supportive factor in the adoption, changeover, and institutionalization of an innovative program is a staff support system to guarantee that staff members truly understand the implications of the new program.[25] Shared decision making is a crucial ingredient in bringing about individual ownership in the change process.

A significant, positive relationship exists between teachers' perceived levels of involvement and their overall job satisfaction.[26] Moreover, teachers' level of influence on the decisions that are made is significantly related both to their level of involvement and to their feeling of job satisfaction.[27] Teachers are less involved in the decision-making process than they would like to be; few staff members can be described as saturated or "over involved" in decision making.[28, 29] If principals are interested in enhancing the level of teachers' job satisfaction, they may begin by involving teachers more often and more extensively in the decision-making process. Participation, however, should not be only "token involvement." Teachers must feel that their involvement is valued and influential regarding decision issues in which they hold either a high personal stake (interest) or a high level of competence (expertise).[30, 31] Therefore, schools should adopt decision-making structures and strategies which allow for maximum, yet selective, involvement of teachers in the decision-making process.

To provide for selective and appropriate teacher involvement in decision making, some secondary schools have established schoolwide councils or committees of representative staff members. Usually chaired by the principal, such instructional improvement committees set schoolwide goals, policies, and objectives and foster the implementation and evaluation of innovative programs within the local school. Teachers on such committees often become involved not only as a result of their individual interest and expertise, but also because of the need to represent constituent interests.[32, 33] Such decision involvement inspires commitment from staff members when they see their participation as being legitimate and the council or committee actually making decisions.[34] Even so, teachers generally do not wish to usurp the role of administrators to make final decisions. What they wish to do is better described as moving from a level of "no involvement" to one of "providing relevant information" or "suggesting alternatives." Thus, participative decision making in schools is still seen as rightfully occurring within an authoritative organizational context.[35] Role responsibilities are clarified, misunderstandings are minimized, and the credibility of both authoritative and participative decision making is enhanced when principals specify who is to be involved on which issues at each stage of the decision-making process.

How do decisions get made in schools? Essentially, the decision-making process includes three broad steps, "before the decision," "the moment of decision," and "after the decision."[36] "Before the decision" includes many interactive activities and behaviors. For example, individual group members may initially suggest solutions, cite decisional constraints, or present evaluations and outcomes of previous programs or proposals that bear upon the issue being considered. A participant's organizational status or position, age, sex, educational training, experience in the district and school, degree of interest and expertise, and many other political and personal factors determine the weight given to that member's contribution.[37] "Before-the-decision" activities typically include a high degree of posing alternative solutions as a means for defining and redefining the problem or issue at hand.[38] That is, instead of each alternative being rationally considered in terms of its positive and negative values and outcomes, various alternatives are weighed, one against another, as to desirability or acceptability. Then, it is not at all unusual for the "satisficing" or "least distressing" alternative to be selected as the appropriate decision to be made.

Although the "moment of choice" typically is viewed as the crucial stage in the decision-making process, in actuality it is anticlimactic. Frequently, it is difficult to determine when major educational decisions actually are made. Even in formally structured committees, majority votes are seldom taken, and when they are, the outcome usually can be predicted. Instead, vocal consensus ("Let's do it that way"), silent affirmation ("Does anyone object?"), or actual exhaustion ("Do whatever you wish") seem to be the rule.[39] In fact, the tendency exists in most schools to talk about issues until the time runs out—shifting the decision-making process from the participative to the authoritative mode.[40]

"After-the-decision" behaviors and activities differ substantially from the previous two stages of the decision-making process. Here, commitment, interest, and expertise predominate, so that the "doers" take over where the "talkers" leave off. After the decision choice is made, particular individuals become the "driving forces" for putting the decision into action.[41] Often, their implementation efforts are not formally acknowledged or systematically evaluated, even by those who originally made the decision. Thus, the charge may be true that educators are better at "deciding" than they are at "doing," since they seldom systematically evaluate the decisions made. At any rate, the decision-making process is qualitatively and quantitatively different "before the decision" and "after the decision." "Before-the-decision" behaviors include a high degree of input and involvement using group processes; "after-the-decision" behaviors include a high degree of individual effort and initiative.[42]

In summary, the decision-making process, while generally logical and rational, is highly political and personal. It interacts dynamically with leadership and change.

The Interaction of Change, Leadership, and Decision Making

The processes of change, leadership, and decision making interact extensively and intensively in innovative schools.[43, 44, 45]

The change process can be conceived as consisting of the following steps or stages: germination, initiation, evaluation, implementation, routinization, refinement, and renewal. Predominant leadership styles of the principal include goal emphasis, work facilitation, supportive, and participative leadership behaviors. Decision involvement can range from "very often" to "seldom," based on participants' interest, expertise, and representation of constituencies. The dynamic interactions between and among change, leadership, and decision making in implementing a major, long-term educational innovation are presented in figure 1. The stages of change of the leader and of group members, the leader's predominant leadership styles, and the frequency and basis of decision involvement are arrayed according to seven sequential phases.

The stages of change differ substantially for leaders and group members. This is shown in figure 1 in the columns concerning the change stages wherein the leader (principal) is always at least one step ahead of the group (staff). Thus, during Phase I, while staff members are routinely implementing existing programs, the leader engages in highly philosophic, visionary, and evaluative "germination" activities concerning "what can and should be." During this early phase, the leader's dominant leadership style of work facilitation for maintaining the present organization gives way to that of goal emphasis to pave the way for the future consideration of change. The leader examines existing policies, programs, and procedures in relation to organizational goals and then reaches out to the immediate and larger

Major Phases	Change Stages: Leader	Change Stages: Members	Leader Styles	Decision Involvement: Frequency	Decision Involvement: Basis
I.	Germination	Routinization	Work Facilitation Goal Emphasis	Often	Expertise
II.	Initiation	Evaluation	Goal Emphasis Supportive	Very Often	Interest Expertise
III.	Implementation	Initiation	Participative Work Facilitation	Very Often	Interest Expertise Constituency
IV.	Routinization	Implementation	Work Facilitation Supportive	Sometimes	Constituency Expertise
V.	Refinement	Routinization	Supportive Work Facilitation	Seldom	Constituency
VI.	Renewal	Refinement	Supportive Goal Emphasis	Very Often	Constituency Interest
VII.	Evaluation	Renewal	Goal Emphasis Participative	Often	Expertise Constituency

Figure 1. Relationships of Change, Leadership, and Decision Making in Implementing Educational Innovation

environment for ideas to improve the school. Staff members and others with experience and expertise are consulted "often" by the leader to help in clarifying goals, identifying discrepancies, defining problems and issues, and tentatively identifying alternatives to improve the existing state of affairs.

Moving to Phase II, the leader begins to initiate change—typically by calling on members to evaluate current conditions and practices in terms of existing goals and to explore both expanded and ultimate goals, as well as various alternatives for achieving them. Here, the leader becomes identified as being in the vanguard of change and is expected to set the pace for group members throughout the change process that has been set in motion. Goal emphasis is stressed by the leader, yet supportiveness of the staff is essential for helping them during the demanding, if not threatening, task of evaluating their own and others' purposes, programs, and procedures. Hence, decision involvement is "very often" appealing to the interests as well as the expertise of staff members. Typically during Phase II, the principal works very closely with key formal and informal staff leaders who share the principal's philosophy and vision and quickly become committed to the need for change. Formal structures may be established and informal structures utilized to ensure widespread involvement in decision making.

During Phase III, the leader implements "awareness" activities to assist the total staff in understanding and initiating the change. The leader must be committed to the change,[46] must thoroughly understand the change program being initiated,[47] and must share with the staff the disadvantages as well as the advantages of the new program—otherwise the staff will subsequently say, "if we had only known what we were getting ourselves into!" The major leadership style is participative, yet the leader also facilitates the work of groups and individuals engaged in initiating the program. The leader also secures the necessary approvals, commitments, and resources to implement the "changeover."[48] Here, the involvement of staff and others in decision making is "very often" with virtually everyone participating. In addition to being based on individual interest and expertise, such participation also must represent constituent interests—otherwise one encounters comments such as, "What's going on around here?" or "Why weren't we consulted?"

During Phase IV, the leader seeks to "routinize" the accepted and initiated change by assisting the staff with their implementation efforts. The leader's predominant style must shift to that of work facilitation to ensure that tasks are accomplished with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of difficulty. Since staff members are "learning new ways," however, the leader also must be high in supportiveness for their new, often additional, efforts. At this phase, widespread decision involvement can actually be dysfunctional—"We've already decided that, so why don't we just go ahead and do it!" Hence, the appropriate decision involvement is "sometimes"—based on expertise and representation of constituent interests.

During Phase V, the leader searches for ways to refine the program that now is becoming routinized by the staff. Supportive leadership behavior is required to provide personal assistance, encourage individual efforts, and maintain harmonious staff relationships. Work facilitation also is essential to ensure smooth operation of the new program. Decision involvement is "seldom," except for certain staff members who represent constituent concerns. During this phase, the school often becomes recognized as a "lighthouse" school, and staff members take great pride in receiving visitors and showing them "how it really works!"

In moving to Phase VI, the leader seeks to renew the innovative program by engaging the staff in refinement activities. Supportive leadership is essential for maintaining staff morale, but goals must be reexamined and reemphasized if the innovative program is to be improved. Constituencies must continue to be represented, yet individual interest is essential for planning and implementing refinement activities. Thus, the staff becomes "very often" involved in planning and conducting in-service and other activities to "fine tune" the innovative program.

During final Phase VII, the leader stresses systematic evaluation of the innovation as a means for renewing and improving it. Utilizing goal emphasis and participative leadership styles, the leader involves members with expertise and who represent constituent interests. Here, the emphasis is on an ongoing evaluation of the innovation. Depending on the evaluative results, it is not at all unusual for the staff to divide at this point into at least two groups—ardent supporters ("We know it will work if we just do it right!") and consistent critics ("We said all along that it just wouldn't work!"). Hence, staff involvement should be "often," as the process recycles to Phase I.

Of course, the foregoing phases depicted in figure 1 represent an oversimplication, since a major, long-term innovative effort subsumes many incremental, short-term changes. Moreover, one's generalized leadership styles and preferences subsume many specific, varied leadership behaviors that often must shift momentarily. Likewise, most major educational decisions have nested within them many minor decisions calling for differential decision involvement. Even so, the major interrelationships described may provide a useful gestalt for present and prospective principals who desire to implement planned educational change to enhance the effectiveness of their schools.

FOOTNOTES

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